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A Discourse Delivered at Brunswick, Maine, April 6, 1820, the Day of the Annual Fast in Maine and Massachusetts

Asa Cummings

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A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT BRUNSWICK, (MAINE,)

APRIL 6, 1820,

THE DAY OF THE ANNUAL FAST IN MAINE

AND MASSACHUSETTS;

BY ASA CUMMINGS, A.B.

BRUNSWICK:

JOSEPH GRIFFIN.....PRINTER.

1820.

BRUNSWICK, APRIL 7, 1820.

SIR,

THE Students of Bowdoin College have appointed us a committee to express to you the deep interest they felt in your sermon of yesterday, and to request a copy for the press. With pleasure we communicate to you their wishes, hoping that you will consent to its publication.

Respectfully your obedient servants,

Jedediah Cobb
Philip Eastman
Josiah H. Hobbs. } Com.

MR. ASA CUMMINGS.

Tutor, Bowd. Coll.

MAY 5, 1820.

GENTLEMEN,

I AM aware that the discourse, of which you have requested a copy, has been rated far above its merits. But a belief has been expressed, that, if circulated, it will *do good*; the subscription obtained for it confirms that belief. Therefore, from a conviction, that the *prospect of doing good* should outweigh every personal consideration, I submit the discourse to your disposal, together with my best wishes for your success in preparing yourselves for a steadfast course of honourable action, both as citizens and christians.

A. CUMMINGS.

Messrs. J. COBB
P. EASTMAN
J. H. HOBBS } Com.

DISCOURSE.

JEREMIAH xiv. 7.

O LORD, THOUGH OUR INIQUITIES TESTIFY AGAINST US, DO THOU IT
FOR THY NAME'S SAKE.

IN these words, we have a striking example of humble confession and ardent prayer. The prophet had been enumerating the flagrant crimes, the disgusting impurities, and abominable idolatry of the Jewish people ; and also the desolating judgments, which were either impending, or actually inflicted, as the just recompense of their aggravated guilt. But, as if borne down with the weight of a nation's woes, and the sense of a nation's guilt, unable to sustain the burden, or to continue the painful recital ; he stops short, and breaks out in the moving expressions of the text. In selecting this passage as a theme for our present meditation, it was not intended to give, in detail, the history and character of the Jews ; nor to particularize those crimes and calamities, which occasioned it ; nor to draw a parallel between that people and ourselves, in whose respective histories there are many things which

bear a striking resemblance. However interesting and instructive, this might be, we shall confine ourselves to another class of observations, which as naturally flow from it, and in which we have an individual and common concern.

The obligations which bind man to his Creator are sacred and permanent. He can neither violate nor forget them, without incurring guilt. Love and obedience are the debt which we constantly owe to God, and which we should be constantly paying. His claim results from the several relations we sustain to him, as the creatures of his power, the recipients of his bounty, and the objects of his paternal care. What can be more reasonable or more just, than a claim, which has such a foundation? What more unnatural, or ungrateful, than to withhold obedience and love from a Being, on whom we depend for every thing which can render us happy? Even natural religion instructs us, as to the kind of return, which it is our duty to make, and as to the nature of the sentiments, with which we should regard our heavenly Benefactor. But when we open the volume of divine truth, these sentiments are enforced by motives the most powerful, that could be addressed to the reason or to the feelings of men. We there learn, that God hath sent his own Son to redeem us from sin, and purchase for us eternal joys. "We are bought with a price," our lives, our blessings, our immortal hopes, are the price of blood; and, what is still more, the blood of the Son of God. And this blood was shed, that he might redeem us to himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Now let us pause, one moment, and reflect; let our thoughts recur to the scenes of our past lives; let them trace, step by step,

the kind providence of God ; let them dwell on the invitations of his mercy, and the affecting exhibitions of his love. Let us review our lives again, and inquire, what was the temper of our hearts, what the tenor of our conduct towards God, while he was thus mercifully dealing with us ? If we are not totally lost to ingenuous feeling, what must be our emotions at the recollections, which rush upon the mind ? How many of our days have been spent in utter forgetfulness of God ! How base is that ingratitude, with which our consciences reproach us ! How numerous and flagrant those sins, which it lays to our charge ! How excessive that guilt, which we have contracted, by contemning the authority, and abusing the mercies of God ! Surely, here are motives for deep humiliation. Let us then be intent on the important business of the day. Let it be consecrated by ingenuous sorrow. Let us break, if possible, that case, as of triple brass, which shields our hearts against tender impressions. Let us rid ourselves of that self complacency, which it is so natural for us to indulge, and yield our hearts to be wrought upon by the good Spirit of God. Let us be penetrated with the sense of his goodness ; let the remembrance of our sins deeply affect us, and lay us low at his footstool. There, in humble prostration of soul, let us loathe ourselves for all our abominations, and our doings that are not good.

My hearers, it is not my prerogative to arraign you, nor to accuse you, much less, to pronounce sentence against you ; I cannot explore your bosoms, nor reveal the feelings of your hearts. But it may be profitable for us to examine our views of the nature of the duties, which

this day imposes upon us, as individuals, and as members of the community. If we have rightly understood, and faithfully discharged the former, we are prepared to enter upon the latter. How, then, did we commence this day? Did the rising sun find us mourning over our sins? Have our closets borne witness to our repentant sighs? Has the all seeing God beheld us prostrated with the sense of our unworthiness and ill desert? Has he heard our penitential confessions? Have our cries ascended unto him, even into his ear? Then are we prepared publicly to unite in afflicting our souls before God. Then may we hope to keep such a fast as God hath chosen; and shall have no reason to inquire, with the hypocritical Jews, "wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not?" You have been lamenting your individual sins; you have entered the sanctuary of God, grieving for your personal transgressions. Now, my brethren, add to these our national sins, and let your sorrows flow forth afresh. The blots which cleave to our publick character, call also for your tears. How great soever the reason you may have to mourn over the ruins, which sin has made, of peace, of innocence and joy in your own bosoms, still the occasion calls you to cast your eyes over the wide waste of character, and dereliction from principle, which our community exhibits. We will remember, that this is a day of *publick* fasting and humiliation; and it is peculiarly appropriate, that, together with our own, we should make the publick sins, the burden of our grief.

I have taken it for granted, that we are a "sinful nation, a seed of evil doers;" proofs of the fact will appear, as we proceed. If this be the case, we cannot hope for a long continued prosperity, but from repentance

and reformation. The foundation of our future happiness must be laid in the tears of penitence,—a truth equally applicable to individuals and to communities. How desirable, then, that we should know and assume the posture which belongs to us, which becomes us as sinners against God, who holds our destinies in his hand, and will not acquit the obstinate offender. How earnestly ought we to pray, that penitence and humility may pervade the hearts of all, to whom it has been recommended to devote this day to fasting and prayer; that God may look down from his throne in the heavens, and behold the members of several extensive communities on their knees, at the same time, acknowledging their transgressions, and raising their united cry to heaven, praying as in the text: “O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name’s sake.” “They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them,” said God of his ancient people. When he “heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, and praying, Turn thou me, and I shall be turned,”—he is represented also as relenting, and revoking the doom he had denounced; “Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still; I will surely have mercy upon him.”

That such may be our penitence, and such the efficacy of our prayers, let us,

I. Point out some of those prevailing “iniquities which testify against us,” as motives for humiliation; and,

II. Appropriate the petition in the text, “do thou it for thy name’s sake.”

Ingratitude holds a prominent place in the catalogue of our publick sins. To feel this in all its force, it will be

necessary to revert to the many interpositions of God in our behalf. Never, perhaps, was a people so highly favoured of heaven. In no events which concern the welfare of mankind, has the hand of God been more signally displayed, than in the origin and growth of the American people. Scarcely two centuries have passed since a few emigrants from the old world landed, for the first time, on the shores of New England. Fleeing from persecution, they entered this then dreary wilderness, which no christian foot had ever trod; whose deep and gloomy recesses echoed, not with the "healing voice of christian charity," but with the howlings of wild beasts, and the more frightful yells of merciless savages. How easily might these barbarians have annihilated, at a single onset, the little defenceless band of pilgrims. Unless the Lord had been their defence, with one blow, might they have destroyed this embryo of an empire, which now holds a primary rank among the nations of the earth; whose resources, valour and enterprize, are found adequate to every emergency; and whose glory will shortly, if our sins do not prevent, eclipse that of all other nations. Entrusting themselves to the divine protection, they were permitted to gain an establishment, and to turn the wilderness into a fruitful field. God drove out the heathen before them, and showed by the most signal interpositions, that his providence was concerned in their preservation. Many times did the clouds gather over them with threatening aspect, and dangers the most disheartening thicken around them, menacing their destruction. They must have fallen a sacrifice to ambuscade, to plots and stratagems, some of which were ripe for execution, had not God interposed, and turned the counsels of their

enemies to foolishness. When relieved from apprehensions of danger from their savage neighbours, by their increased strength and growing importance, they became the sport of European cupidity. The rival of England cast on them an envious eye, and hovered over them, like the vulture over his prey, watching for the occasion to alight and infix his talons. These dangers were scarcely removed, when the mother country commenced an unnatural system of oppression, with a view to crush the enterprising and buoyant spirit of the colonists. But that constancy of mind, that firmness of soul to meet and sustain difficulties and dangers of every description, that sensibility to injury, that regard for justice, that steady reliance on a righteous providence, which God had imparted to the first emigrants, had not wholly become extinct in their sons. That fortitude, which could traverse seas, which could endure the privations of a wintry and inhospitable desert, which could brave the dangers of barbarian fraud and cruelty, was not to be shaken by the tyrannical attitude of civilized despotism. They understood too well the rights of man, and had too high a value for them, to resign them without a struggle. Directed, as we believe, by heaven, they dared to resist the encroachments of lawless power, and to venture, under the greatest discouragements, upon a seven years' war, to gain and perpetuate the blessings of equal laws, and liberty of conscience.

The principal actor in this perilous scene, most heartily ascribed their success to God, as did also many of his companions in arms. To no other cause, indeed, could it have been justly ascribed. The appeal was made to heaven upon their first taking up arms, and reliance ex-

pressly placed on providence to carry them through the arduous conflict, when the probabilities of a favorable issue, were, to human appearance, all against them. Their means of defence bore no proportion to the means of annoyance, possessed by the enemy. Through a second struggle also, when the justice of our cause was doubted by many intelligent and good men, the expediency of the war by many more,—circumstances, which so greatly embarrassed christians in their prayers to God in behalf of our beloved country,—a war, at several stages of which our affairs wore such a disastrous complexion, that all hearts seemed to fail them for fear, and all faces to gather blackness,—the Lord again appeared our deliverer, and gave us peace without taking from us our forfeited liberties. Nay, this very calamity, which we feared might prove the ruin of our liberties, left them established on an apparently firmer basis. Through the government of a kind providence it so terminated, as to raise our national character to a higher elevation, to exalt and extend our reputation for skill, both in tacticks and diplomacy.

“All this cometh from the Lord, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.” And what return have we made? Such as did the rebellious Israelites. Of the God who formed us we have been unmindful, and lightly esteemed the rock of our salvation! Forgetting that God wrought all our deliverances for us, we have said, “Our own arm hath gotten us the victory.” We have boasted of *American prowess*, of the *unconquerable spirit of freemen*, without remembering, that “the battle is the Lord’s, and that he is governour among the nations.” What is the language of our publick celebrations and festivals? Is it

the language of praise and thanksgiving? Are these anniversaries employed in recounting the wonderful works of God towards us, as motives to excite our gratitude? By how many is the Author of our blessings once thought of? How grossly are these festivals perverted! Whether they originated in gratitude to God, we will not confidently assert; but they have, at some times, and in some places, been employed to excite and to cherish this salutary feeling; and we may be assured, that no meaner principle, than that of patriotism, led to their institution. We are far from intimating, that every thing, not professedly religious, is to be reprobated. The anniversary of our nation's birth, we believe, *might* be improved by such a notice of the interesting events of our history, and of those worthy men, whose achievements it records, as to lead us to prize more highly our liberty, and increase our attachment to those excellent institutions, which we have inherited. But the manner, in which the day is now celebrated, destroys many, and, we fear, makes no patriots. Exulting in freedom, we prove ourselves the slaves of appetite. The morning presents us with a promiscuous crowd of old and young, and frequently of both sexes, collecting together in some place of publick resort. They listen, for a few minutes, to a popular harangue, and then resort to the banquet. I will spare you a description of the profaneness, the indelicacy, the disorder, which are almost sure to follow. Did the evil terminate with the actors, we would have passed such scenes in silence; but children and youth are interested spectators, and learn to ape the profligate manners of their sires; and in this way the evil spreads and infects society. When night disperses the crowd, what a mortifying spectacle do we wit-

ness! The way side is lined with the most pitiable objects, whose reason is mantled in the fumes of liquor; and who have either lost the power of locomotion, or, if not entirely motionless, their bodies are no longer obedient to the commands of the will.* Who has not witnessed the various and³abominable excesses, which usually accompany certain stages of intoxication? And when it is considered, that many thousands in the different portions of our country are, at the same time, indulging in "the same excess of riot," what an alarming stride is made in the progress of degeneracy! What a torrent of corruption is let loose upon the community! Who can estimate the aggregate of mischief, which is thus, in one day, done to society? "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people, and unwise?"

Celebrations thus conducted are not less prejudicial to patriotism, than to religion. The love of country can have no place in transactions which have a demoralizing effect. Not the bible only teaches us, that *righteousness exalteth a nation*; it is the unanimous voice of history, that a republick cannot survive the virtue of its citizens. That day, in which our degeneracy becomes universal, will shine on a nation of slaves.

If our ingratitude appears so great in the perversion of political privileges;—if it appears great upon a view

* The spectacle is too common to need any particularity of description. The conceptions of the most inattentive observer will give him a more lively representation of it, than it is in the power of language to present. The great English dramatist has, indeed, drawn a picture, which approaches very near to "the life."

"————— red hot with drinking;

"So full of valour, that they *smite* the air

"For breathing in their faces; beat the ground

"For kissing of their feet."

TEMPEST.

of our natural advantages, such as a healthful climate, a fruitful soil, and a profusion of every thing to supply our ordinary temporal wants,—what a tartarean hue does it assume in view of our religious privileges. It is to the *religion* of our ancestors, more than to any other principle, that we owe our greatness. It is this alone, which can account for all those wonders which were wrought, either by themselves, or by the Almighty in their behalf. It was to find a resting place for the ark of their God, that they first sought the unexplored wilds of America. It was religion, which gave that tone to their character; that cool, collected, persevering fortitude, which no adversity could subdue. It was this which rendered them unconquerable by men; for it was in defence of the altars of their God, that they fought. It was *faith in God*, which bore them undismayed through dangers and perils, from which the infidel would shrink affrighted. A religion, which, with its ordinances, had afforded them such support and solace, through the most trying scenes, and the most appalling dangers, they knew it was worth every exertion, and any sacrifice, even of life itself, to transmit uncorrupted to their posterity. They discharged their weighty trust. Through them we received the gospel in its purity; but have not, like them, made it our rule of life. They scrupulously regarded, and generously supported its institutions, which we are suffering to sink into disuse. They had also their domestick altars, around which the members of the household daily knelt in humble prayer, and grateful acknowledgment of the divine goodness. Thus they engaged heaven in their cause, and the promise of the God of truth became pledged for their preservation and increase. We are

sure we have not attributed too much to religion. How ungrateful then to proscribe this our best friend! Our disregard of its positive institutions, are certain evidence of our aversion to its moral precepts; for though the form of religion may exist without the power, yet the power of religion cannot long survive the form. This subject, although every sin convicts us of ingratitude, merits a distinct consideration: we shall, therefore, in the enumeration of those 'iniquities which testify against us,' give the next place to our

Neglect of the institutions of religion. Of these the principal and most important is that of the holy sabbath. The due observance of this is almost certain to secure a proper regard for the rest: the neglect of this is as sure to bring all external, and consequently, all internal religion into disrepute. In proportion as this neglect prevails, it fixes upon us the character of a sinful people. It is the command of God, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." There cannot, then, be a "surer proof of the alienation of the heart from God and religion, than a disinclination for the peculiar duties of the sabbath."

Assembling together for the publick worship of God; "pouring out our hearts before him in penitent confessions and earnest prayer; meditating on the love of Christ, joining in edifying discourse; instructing the ignorant and strengthening the weak—are some of the delightful exercises, to which the recurrence of this day invites us." Yet how small, comparatively, is the number, who take delight in these exercises, or spend the consecrated hours in these heavenly employments! How common has it become to "cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God!" How few are glad, when it is said

to them, "Come, let us go up to the house of the Lord." How lean and meagre the multitude of those who keep holy day! What contempt is thrown upon this divine ordinance! In some parts of our land it is said to be regarded, as a day of recreation, a fair, a market day for the most degrading and dishonourable kinds of traffick. Indeed, in our own section of the country, whose scrupulous reverence for religious institutions was, till lately, proverbial, the attentive observer will witness violations, almost as flagrant. What sober man is there, acquainted with the manners of our cities, whence the manners of the country receive much of their complexion, who has not been pained at the profanations he has witnessed among many in the higher ranks of life! some desecrating this holy day by their rural excursions, some by their parties of pleasure, or by such other courses, as would need an apology even on secular days. Where, indeed, is the village of any considerable extent, which has not its group of profligates, its haunts of vice, its scenes of riot or diversion, whither multitudes resort to fritter away this consecrated time, which hangs so heavily upon them, and for whose appropriate duties they have a hearty disgust. Thus instead of gaining strength to resist and conquer the corruptions of their nature, they sink themselves the more deeply into that moral degradation, from which it is feared they will never rise. Instead of anticipating the employments of heaven, of which the sabbath is so significant a type, and whose exercises tend so directly to purify and exalt the soul, they are debasing their natures, hardening their hearts, searing their consciences, and preparing themselves to become fuel for that fire, which never shall be quenched. With how many also, is the

sabbath a day of business, instead of rest. How many are immersed in schemes and devices to increase their treasure, suffering all the tormenting anxieties of the worldling, when by prayer, and reflection, and the study of God's word, they might transfer their thoughts to a world of certain bliss, and teach them to dwell, with ineffable delight, on "an inheritance, which is incorruptible, undefiled, and never to fade away."

To the pious mind, that sees the necessary connexion, which subsists between a due observance of the sabbath and our civil and religious interests, it is really distressing to witness the abuses that prevail; and it is distressing to reflect, that any countenance should be given to such abuses by those who ought to be "ministers of God for good unto us." Is it owing to brutish stupidity, or daring presumption, that not one day in the week can be hallowed according to divine appointment? What an affront to heaven, to profane what God has made sacred! What unconcern for the soul, to deprive it of the means of grace! What contempt for the gospel, to refuse it a weekly hearing! What an insult to the Saviour, to spurn that salvation, which was the purchase of his blood! This neglect of the institutions of religion, is both the consequence, and the cause, of a species of

Infidelity, which may be added to the catalogue of our publick sins. This principle, or rather, this want of principle, necessarily induces a neglect of the sabbath, of a preached word, and of all those solemn services, which are intended to fit men for another life. To this pernicious principle we might trace every evil, which the occasion calls upon us to lament. It is the "fertile source of

every error damned." We are prepared to sustain the charge of bigotry and superstition in attaching too much importance to systems of belief and modes of worship. We however aver, that we would be the last to impose shackles upon the human mind. Liberty to think and judge for one's self, on all opinions advanced by men, is the prerogative of every individual. It is a right which he ought to assert, and never relinquish, but with his latest breath; a talent, for which he is answerable to God. Religion has nothing to fear from close scrutiny; she challenges investigation, she courts free inquiry. But it is our duty to take notice of a criminal perversion of language. Who are these that appropriate to themselves the character of free inquirers? Who are these sticklers for free-thinking? Those who never think at all. Who are these that contend so earnestly for the right of private judgment? Those who are determined to judge as passion shall prompt. Else, why do their decisions invariably fall in with their unholy inclinations? Else, why do we witness so many preaching and embracing the most anti-scriptural notions, flattering themselves and others, that they shall have peace, though they walk in the imagination of their heart, when the word of truth declares, that "there is no peace to the wicked?" that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations, that forget God." Now what is this,—call it infidelity, or universalism, or by any other specious name,—what is it, but to charge falsehood upon God? to allege, that his anger is not to be dreaded,—his grace not to be desired,—the overtures of his mercy not to be regarded? While they thus trample under foot the blood of the Son of God, and do despite to the spirit of

grace, let them remember, that he, whose sentence will decide the destinies of men, hath declared, that "*he that believeth not shall be damned.*"

Let none of this description contend, that they follow their honest convictions. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." Let them examine themselves,—they will find that self love or passion have chiefly influenced their opinions,—that man requires very little evidence to persuade him to embrace that which he wishes should be true. They will find that pride and vanity have had a share in originating and confirming their errors. They betray this secret, when they boast of exemption from the superstitious notions of their forefathers;—when they insinuate their own superiour penetration and strength of intellect, by treating their ancestors as bigots and fanaticks. We cannot speak of the stern morality and rigid piety of our forefathers, but our ears must be filled with a long detail of their "*ridiculous superstitions;*" or we must be confronted with the story of their hanging witches, and persecuting Quakers,—as though this blot on our early history could screen the more destructive and guilty crimes of our partial infidels in modern days. I say, *more* destructive and guilty; for the victims of our forefathers' superstition were few,—the evil was of short continuance, and they could do no more than kill the body. But the poison of false principle infects thousands, and tens of thousands; and, unless the grace of God prevent, the evil will be permanent, and ruin the soul forever.

In propagating their sentiments, this class of men are chargeable with a most unmanly disingenuousness. With

respect to none is the caution of our Saviour more worthy of regard, *beware of wolves in sheep's clothing*. They gild the fatal bait, which is to beguile unwary souls. They do not always present their doctrines in their own naked deformity, but with such accompaniments, as a good man might admit, but for their association with such principles, and for such a purpose. At first, they will, perhaps, profess to agree with you, at least in some general truths. When they have gained your confidence, they will suggest the possibility that some parts of scripture have generally been misunderstood, guarding meanwhile against suspicion; till, proceeding by gentle degrees, they come to insinuate their objections against a general judgment, and future rewards and punishments, knowing that if these distinguishing doctrines of the Bible are once distrusted, their work is in effect, completed. Having once infused doubts with respect to these truths, the progress is short and rapid to that degree of impiety, in which they will deride as absurd, and ridicule with unblushing face, "the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." And when once those restraints, which a belief in future punishment imposes, are taken off, there is no security to virtue: The way is prepared for every species of crime. The man, who casts a covetous eye on his neighbour's goods, will only wait for a time, when he may escape detection, to make them his own, little regarding the means. Hence the distressing intelligence of murders, robberies and thefts, which is brought by almost every mail. The man, who does not believe that "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," will practise fraud and falsehood upon his fellow men, with no other

concern, than how he may escape conviction. Hence that want of truth and sincerity, which so generally prevail; that distrust in man of his fellow, which requires some other pledge, than a bare promise, in order to feel secure. The Lord hath said, that he "will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain." It is a disbelief of this warning, that takes off all restraint from the tongue of the profane, when he "sets his mouth against the heavens:" hence it is that profane language has become the ordinary dialect of a large mass of the community; and "because of swearing, the land mourneth." The man who does not believe, that "no fornicator or unclean person shall inherit the kingdom of God," will be restrained from indulgence only by want of opportunity, or concealment; hence those dissolute practices, which are making such an alarming progress, "of which it is a shame to speak," and, "for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

We are told,* that "drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God." But, alas! how numerous is the class, upon whom this truth has no effect! Intemperance is one of the crying abominations of our land. It is every year carrying off its victims in large numbers. It is every day disturbing the harmony, and interrupting the tranquillity of families. It is every day multiplying afflicted widows and helpless orphans. It is degrading man from his distinguished rank in the works of God; prostrating the finest talents; breaking down the firmest constitutions. It is robbing children of their inheritances, the poor of their charities, and the heathen of their claims. The misery, which a habitually intemperate

* 1 Cor. vi. 10.

man brings upon his family, it is beyond our power to estimate. The evil, which he does to society by the contagion of his example, cannot be known till the great day. The extent of the evil, which he does to himself, he will learn in the world of woe. Nothing more comforting or encouraging, than this fearful doom, can we find in the Bible for the drunkard, so long as he persists. And the number of these may well excite our alarm.

There is a crime of most daring effrontery, and blackest guilt, which, though not peculiar to our nation, nor common to the various classes of the community, yet throws a shade over our character, because it is thought to be in the power of the publick eventually to put an end to it,—I mean, the *practice of duelling*. Viewed in its principle, or its effects, it is equally unchristian and inhuman.* When we consider the high rank and talents

* The amiable Cowper has spoken of this practice, as a christian and philanthropist; though not without some strokes of merited satire :

“——To trample on our Maker’s laws,
 “ And hazard life for any or no cause,
 “ To rush into a fix’d eternal state
 “ Out of the very flames of rage and hate,
 “ Or send another shivering to the bar
 “ With all the guilt of such unnatural war,
 “ Whatever use may urge or honour plead,
 “ On reason’s verdict is a madman’s deed.
 “ Am I to set my life upon a throw,
 “ Because a bear is rude and surly? No—
 “ A moral, sensible, and a well-bred man,
 “ Will not affront me, and no other can.
 “ Were I empower’d to regulate the lists,
 “ They should encounter with well-loaded fists;
 “ A Trojan combat would be something new;
 “ Let DARES beat ENTELLUS black and blue;
 “ Then each might show to his admiring friends,
 “ In honourable bumps his rich amends,
 “ And carry, in contusions of his skull,
 “ A satisfactory receipt in full.”

of its abettors, it strikes us as one of the most astonishing instances of the force of human depravity and infatuation. Must we make an annual sacrifice of choicest blood to a custom, which had its origin in barbarity? A nation's tears have hardly done flowing for her Hamilton, to whose incomparable talents our republican government is so much indebted for its proportions and stability; and yet the manner, in which he came to his end, renders it painful to think of him. He gave his life to glut the envious malice of a fiend. His image rises before us, stained with blood. We could not contemplate it without horror, had he not exhibited evidence of repentance, and expressed his utter detestation of the crime, into which he had fatally suffered himself to be led. Within a few days, our Decatur, also, has fallen in the like inglorious combat. He, whose youthful bravery could face death in front of Tripolitan batteries,—who won a brilliant gem for his country from the proud mistress of the ocean,—who consummated his fame in the reduction of piratical Algiers,—was, at last, too dastardly to sustain, too mean to withhold, an insult from a fellow subject. He has ruined his well earned fame. The laurels, with which he was decked, are, by his own hand, torn from his brows forever. “He died as a fool dieth.” Can his former services, great as they were, wipe from his character, the stain which by his last act it contracted? No. The prince of darkness was once an archangel; is he therefore entitled to our gratitude?—Our religion, our love of country will not allow us to palliate the deed. We must hold it up to publick execration. The duellist is guilty of a very heinous and complicated crime; it is murder, and it is suicide; and murder and su-

icide attended with every possible aggravation. Why is not the survivor of such combats arrested, tried, condemned, and put to an ignominious death, like other murderers? Why are the seconds not executed, like accomplices in other murders? No sufficient reason can be found, either in our religion, or the spirit of our laws. Let the survivor and the accomplices pay the forfeit of their crime on the gallows, and soon the practice will cease to be esteemed honourable. Let magistrates and jurors be cautious, lest they encourage the practice by giving to wilful murder, attended with the most aggravating circumstances, a mitigated name, thus exempting the guilty from the punishment they deserve.

We come now to a topick, at which the heart sickens, and from which the feelings revolt. A nation of freemen, who glory in their liberties; who are sensible to every insult offered to their sovereignty; who would hazard their lives and their treasures sooner than surrender the most inconsiderable right; whose very watchword has been, *liberty or death*; this nation holds myriads of human beings in bondage! Yes, they wield the rod of oppression, which in their hands is a rod of iron. The miserable Africans groan under their reiterated strokes. The slightest offence in themselves, or even the unprovoked caprice of their drivers, costs them many a pang, many a drop of blood. They linger out a miserable existence, without even the solace of hope. They look forward,—but behold no jubilee in prospect. Even the distant hope of manumission, would afford them some mitigation of their pangs and toils; but they foresee no rest, till death shall set them free from their cruel lords. “O this offence is rank, it smells to heaven!” It bears a most

threatening aspect on the destinies of our country. It is a prognostick of calamities, the very contemplation of which fills us with painful misgivings. "I tremble for my country," says Mr. Jefferson,* speaking of slavery, "I tremble for my country, when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever! that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest." In view of this subject, shall the politician tremble, and the christian remain unmoved? It is certain that nations receive their retribution in this world; they are here punished for national sins; because they will have no political existence in the next. There we shall be tried and judged as individuals. But in the history of past ages we may learn the principles of the divine administration, with respect to communities. Degeneracy and crimes are the certain prognosticks of their ruin. Have we not then cause for trembling? When the Almighty shall make inquisition for blood, what shall we answer him? Verily we shall, in our turn, feel the weight of his uplifted rod. This outrage upon justice and humanity, this traffick in human flesh, this oppression of the poor and friendless, will certainly sink the nation that authorizes it, unless their doom be averted by speedy repentance; unless they "undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke."

The influence of slavery upon the morals of a people, is, if possible, more to be lamented, than the cruelties

* Notes on Virginia, Quere 18.

connected with its existence. Take the account of an eye-witness,* who will not be suspected of having overstated the fact. "There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it. The parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to the worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances."

But besides the moral evils inseparable from slavery, it is by no means certain, that slaves, considered as an article of property, are profitable to their owners. Men best qualified to judge have decided that they are not;† and this decision, we believe, is confirmed by facts. To account for this, we need go no farther than to the principles of the human frame.‡ That it is a fact, will perhaps appear from a comparison of the slave states with those in which every man is free. Which are the more rich, prosperous and happy? We have the means of making a fair comparison. The Ohio river, in a course of several hundred miles, separates a district of country possessed by slave holders, from another inhabited by freemen. Ask the traveller, as he glides

* Mr. Jefferson.

† Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, B. i. Chap. 8, and B. iii. chap. 2.

‡ Stewart's *El. Phil. Hum. Mind*, vol. ii. p. 367. (Boston 1814.)

down the stream, which side presents the more agreeably interesting and engaging prospect; on which side are the more flourishing, best cultivated and productive farms. Ask him, when he turns his boat ashore, and enters a cottage or an inn for refreshment, on which side he is best served, and sees the most domestick happiness. He will tell you, on the bank inhabited by freemen. On the other side, indeed, he occasionally sees more of external splendour, but little evidence of those tranquil domestick joys, which give its chief value to existence; little of that honest satisfaction, and conscious innocence, which beam from the countenances of freemen, with whom all are free. The slaveholder cannot conceal his uneasy, and restless anxiety; whether it proceed from remorse, or from fearful forebodings, lest his injured vassals should revenge upon him the cruelties he has inflicted. If, therefore, slaves do not subserve the interest, nor the happiness of their owners, the crime of the latter is gratuitous, which adds to its enormity.

The apprehensions for his country, expressed in the quotation from Mr. Jefferson, are entitled to more weight, considering the source, whence they come. He is evidently inclined to the opinion, though he does by no means express himself in absolute terms, that Africans are inferiour in intellect to the whites, and that no advantages could render them equal. He offers many considerations, and states many facts, which render the opinion probable. And yet, notwithstanding this belief in their inferiority, he apprehended some signal judgment awaited his country, for holding them in bondage. How greatly must these apprehensions be strengthened, when we unrol our Declaration of Independence and read, "that all men are created equal; that they are endow-

ed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights; that among these are *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*?" or when we open our Bible and read, that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth?" and that Christ our Master and Redeemer has taught us to look upon all men, as our neighbours and brethren? O, how unnatural to enslave and mangle our *brethren*! What flagrant cruelty, to bind, beat, torture those, who are *bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh*! *The voice of our brothers' blood cries to heaven from the ground.* How shall we meet them at the bar of God? "Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

My brethren, our subject is a fruitful one; we might lengthen out the catalogue of our crimes to an indefinite extent. But time admonishes to desist. Enough has been said to convince us, that it is not without reason, that we are exhorted to humiliation and repentance. Or, if I might be permitted to add another sin to the enumeration already given, it should be our *insensibility*. Is it a certain truth, that the "wicked shall not escape unpunished?" and does the history, both sacred and profane, of past ages, render it certain, that nations are punished in this world? and is it admitted, that our publick character is stained with crimes, that deserve chastisement? Our careless security is then an ominous symptom. Since the return of peace, our prospects have been encouraging, and given promise of a long continued prosperity. But let us not be so infatuated as to forget, that *virtue alone* is the only firm basis of our security. Danger is not always remote, when it is absent from our

thoughts. What sudden reverses may overtake us, God only knows. "In the days of Noe, they were eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, when the flood came and took them all away." Who is able to predict the final result of that important question, which has lately agitated the supreme council of our nation? Who once anticipated the excitement, which it has already produced? Who can divine all the consequences, which are yet to flow from it? It may be weakness, but we confess we cannot look forward to its probable effects without alarming apprehensions. A series of causes *may* have begun to operate, which in their progress, will humble our pride, and make our once happy country the theatre of turmoil, blood and desolation. The bare possibility of such an event should break our slumbers! Danger unseen or defied, is not therefore annihilated. Are men invulnerable because they shut their eyes, when the messengers of death are discharged at them?

It is only by constant vigilance, diligent and prayerful observation, that we can read the book of providence, and interpret the "signs of the times." An indifference to the movings of providence, a security which results from irreligion, and not from trust in God, is at all times an alarming symptom. This was eminently the case with the Jews, in the time of Jeremiah. This prophet, being warned of God, foresaw the ruin, which was coming upon his countrymen. He warned them with the most scrupulous fidelity and plainness; but his words, like the warnings of Lot to the people of Sodom, "were unto them as idle tales, and they believed them not." It is affecting to witness the grief, and listen to the remon-

strances, of this weeping prophet, in consequence of their perverseness. He saw them rushing fearlessly on in those criminal courses, which he knew would hurry them to their catastrophe, and was so affected at their infatuation, that he could wish his "head were waters, and his eyes a fountain of tears, that he might weep day and night." He repeats his message, and calls upon them to *amend their ways and their doings*: and when they refuse to hear, "he weeps in secret places for their pride." All who know the *terrors of the Lord*, will be affected in a similar manner at the presumption of their fellow men.

If we do not anticipate danger from sources, whence we have been accustomed to expect it, are we therefore to feel ourselves secure? The Almighty can send a pestilence, which shall sweep us all from the earth. He can make the heavens over our head brass, the earth under our feet iron, and destroy us all by a famine. He can leave us to work out our own destruction by arming ourselves against each other in a civil war. He can select any of the ten thousand instruments he possesses, to punish us as our sins deserve. We have no security, but in the protection of heaven, and this is promised only to the obedient. Let us not therefore presume.

But while we dissuade from presumption, let us also guard against despair. We have called your attention to these "spots in our character," not because it affords any pleasure to a benevolent mind to dwell upon them; but with the hope of engaging your determined exertions to wipe them away.

"—Publick censure speaks a publick foe,

"Unless a zeal for virtue guide the blow."

If I might be indulged a short digression, many reasons

might be stated, why we may hope that God "will yet be favourable to our land, and pity this people." We trust there are many of his *hidden ones*, to whom our guilt is a source of grief, and who are incessantly pleading with God in our behalf. If their number bears any considerable proportion to the whole population, we may hope our doom will be averted; since ten righteous men would have saved Sodom from destruction. Our immoralities have excited alarm in some, and induced them to engage in a union of efforts to put a stop, if possible, to the progress of degeneracy. Exertions have been made, and it is believed not wholly without success, to check the growing intemperance of the age. Whatever may be the defects of our laws, there are individuals, who exert their personal influence, to maintain a due observance of the Sabbath. We still have the Bible in our hands uncorrupted, and in many places its doctrines are preached with faithfulness and effect. The age is fruitful in plans for doing good to the bodies and souls of men. We have charitable and humane societies, to relieve the distresses of honest poverty and unavoidable misfortune. Exertions are made to furnish the ignorant with the means of knowledge; and thousands of children receive the most important instruction in Sabbath schools. Our tract societies have circulated many excellent little treatises as an antidote to corrupt principles. Our domestick missions annually effect a vast aggregate of good, by furnishing the destitute with religious instruction. We have a society for educating pious youth to go forth as labourers into the vineyard of our Lord. We have a society for colonizing free people of colour, which we trust will do something to repair the many injuries we have done them.

We have a society for Foreign Missions, whose magnificent operations are exciting the wonder of the christian world, and which is annually sending forth heralds, "to make ready a people for the Lord," in different heathen nations. At the head of all, we have a National Bible society, which has united the hearts and engaged the prayers of many thousands; and which is continually multiplying and circulating copies of the holy Scriptures. All these societies are supported, and their daily increasing operations continued by voluntary contributions. Till these pious charities, and these truly christian exertions begin to fail, we will believe that God has mercies in reserve for us; and this belief will be strengthened in proportion as these charities increase, and these exertions multiply.

Let me add, the publick recognition of this day of fasting and prayer, by the President of the Convention, augurs much good for Maine. It is a pledge, that a usage, so venerable for its antiquity, with which are connected so many pious and interesting associations, and which, if duly observed, is to be the medium of so many invaluable blessings,—will be long perpetuated. The sentiments expressed in his proclamation, are congenial with our feelings, and animating to our hopes. The distinguished man, to whose instrumentality we owe the consecration of this day, will, we doubt not, agree with us in saying, that it would be impious *not* to acknowledge an overruling providence in this event. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."

II. We were to appropriate the petition, "Do thou it for thy name's sake."

"The mercy of God, and the honour of his name, supply many a plea to urge before him, in behalf of those whose iniquities testify against them." This was the plea, which Moses urged with such success, when God, provoked to anger by the crimes of the Israelites, had threatened their immediate ruin. Numb. xiv. 11—20. Joshua also, when Israel "turned their backs before their enemies," in expostulating with God, urges the same plea: "What wilt thou do unto thy great name?" The same consideration should embolden us to make persevering supplication in behalf of our countrymen, in whose religious character the declarative honour of God is so intimately concerned.

Do thou *it*. What? that which our exigencies most urgently require. We may understand it as a humble request for any or all those things, with respect to which we perceive a necessity for the divine interference, and without which we cannot hope for the smiles and protection of heaven. That God would awaken in all classes an effective zeal for reformation; that by turning from our corrupt courses, we may wipe away those stigmas of reproach, which are now fastened upon us; that by "breaking off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by showing mercy to the poor," we may be placed in a state of security from those judgments, which are sure to follow a course of obstinate and persevering transgression:

That God would preserve to us our inestimable form of government, our civil and religious liberties; that, though we have forfeited these by our ungrateful abuse of them, he would still continue them, and teach us how to appreciate and improve them:

That he would bless our rulers with his presence, and with communications of his wisdom, that they may at all times be actuated by the spirit, and governed by the precepts of the gospel; and that, not only by promulgating and executing the most salutary laws, but also by exhibiting bright examples of personal piety and devotion, they may be, in an eminent sense, the "ministers of God for good unto us;" and that the people "may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty."

As the elements of happy society must be sought for in individuals and families, let us pray for the revival of family government, and family religion; that parents may resume the too generally neglected duty of instructing their children in the law of God, and in the gospel of his Son; that they may daily collect them around the family altar, and commend them, by prayer, to God and to the word of his grace; that by thus bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, the "Spirit may be poured out upon themselves, and a blessing upon their offspring."

Let us pray for schools and nurseries of children, that they may be preserved from the influence of corrupting principles, and wicked example; that their minds may be early formed to virtue, and imbued with the doctrines and spirit of religion, that they may contract those habits of order and sobriety, which shall give the best security of their future usefulness, as members of society.

Let our higher seminaries of learning be made the frequent subject of our prayers; that the extensive influence, which they exert over society, may ever be on the side of useful knowledge, of genuine, unadulterated christianity, that they may annually send forth large compa-

nies to proclaim salvation through Christ to our own citizens, and to those who are "perishing for lack of vision."

Let us pray, that God would revive his pure worship, where it has long been neglected; that temples dedicated to his name may rise in our moral deserts, and in the waste places of our Zion, and be thronged with devout worshippers:

That "an unction from the Holy One" may be granted to the ministers of religion, that they "may open their mouths boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel;" that a divine efficacy may accompany the word, wherever dispensed, till our spiritual wilderness shall become like the garden of the Lord.

And in our prayers, O let us not forget the poor, afflicted sons of Africa, whom we hold in cruel bondage, lest *their* "cries enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth," and bring down upon us the punishment we have merited. We not only enslave their bodies, but deprive them of the means of entering into that "liberty, wherewith Christ makes free." Think of their wrongs, and if you have one spark of humanity, or of piety, you will plead with God for their ransom.

Finally, let us pray that the lusts and passions of men universally, may be subdued by the gospel, be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and that all flesh may see the salvation of God. AMEN.

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NOTE (†) p. 25.

“The experience of all ages and nations I believe, demonstrates, that the work done by slaves, though it appears to cost only their maintenance, is in the end the dearest of any. A person, who can acquire no property, can have no other interest, but to eat as much, and to labour as little as possible. Whatever work he does beyond what is sufficient to purchase his own maintenance can be squeezed out of him by violence only, and not by any interest of his own.”

NOTE (‡) p. 25.

“It has long been an established opinion among the most judicious and enlightened philosophers,—that *as the desire of bettering our condition appears equally from a careful review of the motives, which habitually influence our own conduct, and from a general survey of the history of our species, to be the master-spring of human industry*, the labour of slaves never can be so productive as that of freemen. Not many years have elapsed, since it was customary to stigmatize this reasoning as visionary and metaphysical; and to oppose to it that species of evidence, to which we were often reminded, that all theories must bend;—the evidence of experimental calculations, furnished by intelligent and credible observers on the other side of the Atlantic. An accurate examination of the fact has shown how wide of the truth these calculations were; but independently of any such detection of their fallacy, might it not have been justly affirmed, that the argument from *experience* was decidedly against their credibility;—the facts appealed to resting solely upon the good sense, and good faith of individual witnesses; while the opposite argument, drawn from the principles of the human frame, was supported by the united voice of all nations and ages?”

It was said, (p. 23,) ‘the rod of oppression is in our hands a rod of iron.’ It will, perhaps, excite some surprise, to hear it asserted, that the condition of slaves is worse, under a free, than under an arbitrary government: but this appears to be a well attested fact.

"That the condition of a slave is better under an arbitrary than under a free government, is, I believe, supported by the history of all ages and nations. In the Roman history, the first time we read of the magistrate interposing to protect the slave from the violence of his master, is under the emperors. When Vedius Pollio, in the presence of Augustus, ordered one of his slaves, who had committed a slight fault, to be cut in pieces and thrown into his fish pond in order to feed his fishes, the emperor commanded him, with indignation, to emancipate immediately, not only that slave, but all the others, that belonged to him. Under the republic no magistrate could have had authority enough to protect the slave, much less to punish the master."

"In every country where the unfortunate law of slavery is established, the magistrate, when he protects the slave, intermeddles in some measure in the management of the private property of the master; and, in a free country, he dare not do this but with the greatest caution and circumspection. The respect, which he is obliged to pay to the master, renders it more difficult for him to protect the slave. But in a country, where the government is in a great measure arbitrary, it is much easier for him to give some protection to the slave; and common humanity naturally disposes him to do so. The protection of the magistrate renders the slave less contemptible in the eyes of his master, who is thereby induced to consider him with more regard, and to treat him with more gentleness. Gentle usage renders the slave not only more faithful, but more intelligent, and therefore, upon a double account, more useful. He approaches more to the condition of a free servant, and may possess some degree of integrity and attachment to his master's interest; virtues, which frequently belong to free servants, but which never can belong to a slave, who is treated as slaves commonly are in countries, where the master is perfectly free and secure."

Smith's Wealth of Nations, book iv. chap. vii. part 2.